

House Bill 152

January 15, 2015

Presented by Ken McDonald  
House Fish & Game Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, I am Ken McDonald, Administrator of the Wildlife Division for the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP). I am here today on behalf of the Director in opposition to House Bill 152.

This bill would allow resident hunters 62 years old or older to harvest cow elk with their general elk license under three different scenarios:

1. during the last week of the general season in any hunting district that is over population objective;
2. during any extended or late season in any hunting district that is over population objective;
3. in any district for which any antlerless B-license is issued.

FWP respectfully opposes this bill for a number of reasons:

- Populations are primarily managed through antlerless harvest. In many hunting districts, this bill would add uncertainty to harvest prescriptions because of the unknown impact on antlerless harvest. For perspective, about 15% of resident elk hunters, nearly 20,000 elk hunters, are 62 or older and would be qualify under the provisions of this bill. Currently there are 51 hunting districts, over 30% of all districts, that are at or below objective that offer limited antlerless B licenses for population management purposes. Because this bill would allow cow harvest by seniors in any hunting district with a B-license opportunity, the increased hunting pressure and harvest could easily result in overharvest of elk in any of these hunting districts.
- There is the matter of equity of opportunity to be considered. The added pressure from senior hunters in districts that are at or below objective, where cow harvest is carefully managed, could translate into fewer or no B-license opportunities for all hunters. Also, there are 46 hunting districts that offer youths the opportunity to take a cow in districts at or below objective. This youth opportunity, too, would be compromised or lost because of the added and uncertain pressure from senior hunters.
- This will add complexity to the hunting regulations, and it will be confusing to hunters. Many hunters have difficulty understanding the regulations as they are, and FWP is often criticized for complex regulations. Even with our best public information outreach efforts, the opportunity proposed here would likely be interpreted by many people that seniors can take a cow anywhere during the last week of the season, or even during the whole season.
- The Fish and Wildlife Commission already has the authority to establish seasons and opportunities through its public process. This bill eliminates that authority and flexibility, and removes the ability to adopt site-specific regulations and management prescriptions based on site specific variables.

We appreciate the intent of the sponsor to provide additional senior opportunity directed at over-objective hunting districts. It seems this bill is primarily directed towards addressing over-objective populations. Most hunting districts that are over objective already have liberal antlerless elk harvest opportunities for all hunters, for the entire season. Most such seasons are either-sex and some are antlerless-only for parts of the season. This bill would have little effect on these districts because antlerless hunting is already allowed or managed very liberally.

FWP believes the negative implications far outweigh the potential gains, and the authority to implement something like this already exists, and therefore we urge a do not pass on HB152.



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